

## Childhood Coping Strategies

Kids are smart. In the face of difficulties, they do what they need to do to survive. They learn quickly. They instinctively know how to read the signs of trouble, how to avoid an aggressive parent, how to retreat into a fantasy world, how to gain the love they crave from a pet and how to numb out painful feelings.

As adults, it's easy to lose sight of all the brave, clever and bold things we did to cope as children. As we look back, we may be critical of the ways we coped and condemning of how ineffectual we were to put things right. We may even feel contempt for the child we once were. In reality, we were powerless. As much as we wanted to, we couldn't put our world 'right'. We couldn't kiss others' hurts better, stop Mum or Dad from being 'mean' or make our unhappy home happy.

To clarify your childhood coping strategies, complete the following checklist.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I became self-reliant because I couldn't depend on others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to talk reassuringly to myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I saw myself as a worthwhile person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I expressed my feelings when I was alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I found that being good, helpful and compliant was best.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I kept quiet and made myself invisible to avoid problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to read people and stay alert for signs of trouble.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I got away from home when ever possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to put on a mask so people didn't know what I was feeling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I became skilled at avoiding destructive people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I told lies to keep myself safe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I consciously chose to concentrate on the good things and ignore the bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I used humour to lighten heavy situations and make them more bearable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I turned to animals as a source of comfort and love.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I gained a sense of satisfaction through taking care of others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I stayed close to certain safe family members.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I used my imagination and daydreamed as an escape from reality.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I created an alternative fantasy family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I created hope for myself by weaving stories of a happy future.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I fantasised that I did not belong to this family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I numbed out my feelings to take away the hurt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to 'forget' the bad times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I spaced out to distance myself from what was happening.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I had a special place in my mind I could go when I needed to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I split conflicting experiences into separate compartments in my mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to leave my body if I was being abused.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I expressed my distress through writing, art or other creative pursuits.

## Childhood Coping Strategies - Continued

- \_\_\_\_\_ I deliberately developed my social life and interests outside the home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I became skilful at developing relationships with caring people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I consciously took notice of how others lived and learned from that.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I developed a passion that carried me through the tough times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I adopted a surrogate family and spent as much time there as I could.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I actively resisted doing what I was told if I considered it unfair.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I used anger as a way of making myself feel strong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I rebelled against one or more family members.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I drew nourishment, hope or peace from nature.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was sustained by my spirituality.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I developed my own rituals to help me feel safe.

Hopefully, as you've read this checklist, you've gained a new appreciation of your ingenuity as a child. Remembering and taking stock of your ways of dealing with difficulties as a child is not an attempt to deny the real distress you suffered. Without a doubt, there is a huge, undeniable cost to experiencing childhood hardships. However it can be heartening to recognise the many ways you attempted to protect yourself and quietly resisted those who would hurt you - even if these attempts proved unsuccessful.

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